

Makerspace trailers coming to Fort Hall, Pocatello; labs will help kids explore STEM concepts

Idaho State Journal, Jun 10, 2021



The Idaho Out-Of-School Network and University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development are providing a dozen mobile, pop-up makerspaces to rural and underserved communities statewide with help from the Idaho STEM Action Center, Idaho State Department of Education, Idaho Division of Career & Technical Education, Gizmo-CDA, and several sponsors. In this photo taken at a training event April 30, staff members from the Treasure Valley YMCA, which is the recipient of one of the trailers, help some Caldwell youths create catapults with everyday craft supplies. *Otto Kitsinger for the Idaho STEM EcosySTEM*

East Idaho is getting two pop-up makerspace trailers meant to give kids in rural and underserved communities more opportunities to try out STEM concepts. The Idaho Out-Of-School Network and University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development are deploying the Think Make Create Labs that will be located in Pocatello and Fort Hall, according to a news release. They're placing a total of 12 trailers throughout the state with the help of the Idaho STEM Action Center, Idaho State Department of Education, Idaho Division of Career & Technical Education, Gizmo-CDA and private partners. Locally, the Bannock County Extension 4-H program will host the lab in Pocatello. Sparklight is serving as the lead partner, according to the news release.

"The (Fort Hall) lab is in the final build-out stage by middle and secondary school students with the American Indian Services PREP program in Fort Hall. Gooding High SkillsUSA students led woodworking and materials preparation," according to the news release. "K-6 youth on the Shoshone-Bannock Reservation will begin using it (this month). Battelle Energy Alliance is the lead partner for this lab."

Officials say four makerspace trailers will also be placed in both northern and southwestern Idaho and two will go to southern Idaho. Idaho Out-Of-School Network director Anna Almerico estimates the mobile makerspaces will engage 3,000-plus children this in rural and underserved communities this summer and at least 8,000 youth within a year's time. "Our emphasis with the Think Make Create program is to help communities that don't have much access to quality STEM education," Almerico said in the news release. "We're trying to increase access so Idaho kids can get the best education possible regardless of where they live."

Claire Sponseller, the University of Idaho Extension's 4-H STEM area extension educator, says the labs are equipped with the supplies and tools kids need to not only explore STEM concepts, but also collaborate and problem solve. "The hands-on, flexible nature of these new mobile makerspaces allow kids to get in there

and explore,” Sponseller said in the news release. “We really want kids to experience what it means to play and tinker and experiment and fail and try again, and the Think Make Create Labs will create great opportunities for kids to get excited and test out and see what STEM is all about.” Sponseller says the Idaho effort licensed the Think Make Create concept from Beyond School Bells, a statewide afterschool network in Nebraska.

The project is the Idaho STEM EcosySTEM’s first initiative. “The Idaho STEM EcosySTEM is a network of partners from PreK-12 and higher education, out-of-school educators, business and industry, nonprofits, state agencies, and legislators, with the Idaho STEM Action Center serving as the backbone organization,” according to the news release. “It works to build awareness of and ensure equitable access to science, technology, engineering, and math education opportunities and careers. It also seeks to align STEM education with Idaho’s current and future workforce needs, create successful metrics for STEM education and programming, and build momentum for STEM within the state and nationally.”

STEM Action Center interim executive director Dr. Kaitlin Maguire says STEM knowledge and skills are needed for critical and creative thinking, problem solving, innovation and collaboration. “Nineteen of Idaho’s 20 hot jobs through 2026 require STEM skills, and STEM jobs pay about twice as much as non-STEM jobs,” Maguire said in the news release. “Among Idaho parents who were surveyed, 99 percent believe STEM skills will play an important role in the future, and within a decade 90 percent of jobs will require digital literacy.”



The Idaho Out-Of-School Network and University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development are providing a dozen mobile, pop-up makerspaces to rural and underserved communities statewide with help from the Idaho STEM Action Center, Idaho State Department of Education, Idaho Division of Career & Technical Education, Gizmo-CDA, and private partners. The collaboration recently unveiled the fleet's first five trailers, called Think Make Create Labs, at the Caldwell YMCA, with 40 local youth engaging in a few of the STEM activities offered by the new mobile makerspaces during the event. Otto Kitsinger for the Idaho STEM EcosySTEM

Four mobile makerspaces bound for North Idaho

Jun 2, 2021 Updated Jun 9, 2021



The Lapwai-based UI Extension 4-H program servicing Orofino, Kamiah, and the Nez Perce Reservation will begin using this lab this month. Lewiston High School Skills USA is building the unit. Optum Idaho is the lead partner for this lab.
Otto Kitsinger

Four trailers are bound for North Idaho, two are headed to Eastern Idaho, and one is headed to the Magic Valley along with a box truck that's also been converted to a TMC-branded mobile makerspace. And there is sponsor interest in finding at least four more communities for labs. Project leaders emphasized it would not be possible without generous assistance from private partners, such as Battelle Energy Alliance, Micron, Optum Idaho, Sparklight, and TrailersPlus.

The Think Make Create Lab project is the Idaho STEM EcosySTEM's first official initiative. According to STEM Action Center interim executive director Dr. Kaitlin Maguire, the project sprang from a chance encounter between Almerico and Sponseller at the group's first convening in January 2020.

"It's exciting to see how a network like the Idaho STEM EcosySTEM can be so powerful," Dr. Maguire said. "In this instance, we had a couple people who just happened to be sitting next to each other at a conference talking about ideas and they came up with one that will benefit students across the state. And we have a variety of partners in the network who realized the value of the project and were able to help make their vision a reality."

The Idaho STEM EcosySTEM is a network of partners from PreK-12 and higher education, out-of-school educators, business and industry, nonprofits, state agencies, and legislators, with the Idaho STEM Action Center serving as the backbone organization. It works to build awareness of and ensure equitable access to science, technology, engineering, and math education opportunities and careers.